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Volume 37 | Number 3

Article 3

1957

Concerning Friendship

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Recommended Citation

BreDahl, Noel (1957) "Concerning Friendship," *The Iowa Homemaker*: Vol. 37 : No. 3 , Article 3.

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*"Knowing when to talk
and what to say."*

by Noel BreDahl
Technical Journalism Senior

Concerning

Friendship

DIFFERENT PEOPLE choose different ways of making their mark in the world: Some stick their feet into fresh cement. Some carve their initials on park benches. Some — when they are older but still unsure — erect pretentious tombstones with their names in block letters a foot high, an inch deep into solid granite. Years later these footprints, these initials, these names dug into monuments remain, shallow marks-in-the-world. I have seen lots of them, gathering dust.

But there are other people who make other choices. There are people for whom the measure of a man's mark is the kind and number of friends he has, for whom care and cultivation of the flowers of friendship

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Friendship (Continued from page 6)

are the most satisfying things in life. There are people like this, and they are happy.

There are no rules for friendship. There's no "way" to be a friend. It's the spontaneity of one's relations with others that makes friendship what it is; it's this same spontaneity that makes any definition of friendship elusive and any advice unsuitable.

But by showing how others have become my friends, perhaps I can show how you can become someone else's friend . . . and have new friends of your own. To begin with, I must tell you that there are different kinds of friendships. Different occasions demand different kinds. I list seven kinds of friends below:

The friends we know well.

The friends who know us well.

The friends we know and work with, but don't know well.

The friends we have to know.

The friends we wish we knew.

The friends we create.

The friends we've never met.

Some of these kinds of friends are naturally better than others; some, in fact, we're better off without. But each is different. Each has a different purpose and a different satisfaction.

Friends We Know Well

First of all, there are the friends we know well. Emerson had this kind of friend in mind when he said, "A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him, I may think aloud." Henry Adams likewise had the friend-we-know-well in mind when he said that "One friend in a lifetime is much; two are many; three are hardly possible." Friends of this sort are rare. They are the most valuable possession a person can have.

Although it is not absolutely necessary that you be seeing these friends every day, it is usually true that you have at some time known them on such a day-by-day basis. They are the people who listen patiently to whatever you have to say — be it about love or money, food or clothes, life or death — and who, after listening, say what you want them to say. A friend, then, is a listener who knows you so well that he knows when to talk and what to say. There is this agreement and this understanding between friends who know each other well.

When To Talk

Such a situation usually comes about through day-by-day contact, although many friendships are born at first sight, through the ability of one or the other — or both — to know when to talk and what to say. I use this word "talk" not only to mean spoken words but also visible actions. You don't have to speak to be heard. But you do have to communicate, one way or another, a spirit of friendship.

Again I use an inexact word, in fact a whole phrase of them — "a spirit of friendship." This time, however, I am unable to define what I mean any more ex-

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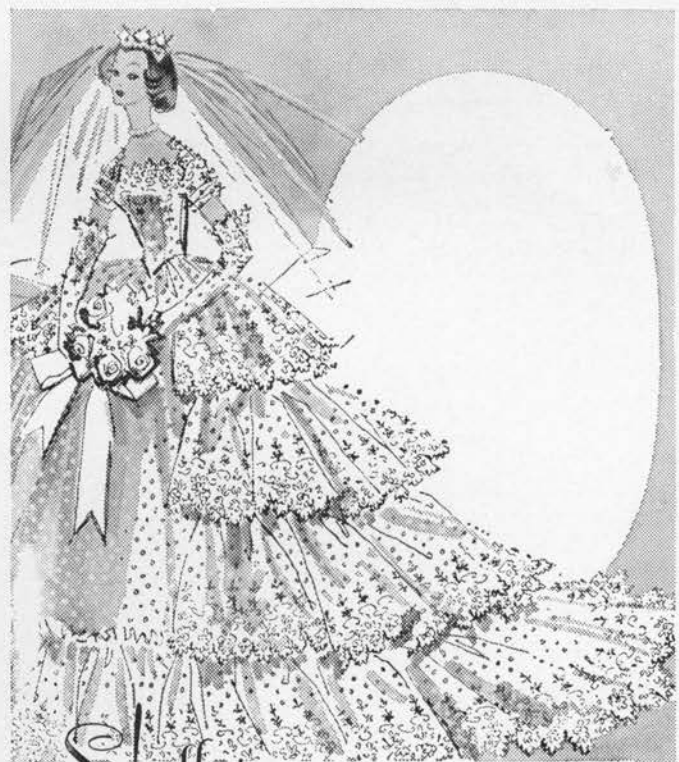


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actly. I can only state my belief that friendships contain nothing mystical and eternal about them; that they are simply practical relationships which, as Dr. Johnson says, one must keep in repair. And what one must use to keep such relationships "in repair" is something abstractly known as "a spirit of friendship." Friends who know each other well, have it.

It's a fine-line distinction between the friend-we-know-well and the friend-who-knows-us-well. Usually they're one and the same, but not necessarily. I mentioned earlier that the friend-*we-know-well* may be a "friend at first sight." It is possible. But in such a case the friend-at-first-sight would not necessarily be a friend-who-knows-us-well. That would depend upon whether or not he knew when to talk and what to say. However, such a friend-at-first-sight who is *not* also a friend-who-knows-us-well, may later *become* a friend-who-knows-us-well. Anyone who can learn can change.

No Caste System

But this is all quite confusing and not the least bit important, except that if you have been able to follow it you will understand that it is possible for friendships to change from one classification to another. There is no caste system of friendship. The friend-*we've-never-met* may become the friend-*we-know-well*. The friend-*we-know-well* may also become the friend-*we-wish-we-knew*.

Now that you know this — and before you rush out to convert half a dozen people you know only as co-workers on some committee; before you rush out to make them friends-*you-know-well* — let me advise you against it. Such a thing is wasteful. In the first place, you probably have a capacity for only two or possibly three such friends; in the second place, you only have a need for one.

But you do need other friends of other kinds, and the secret of all friendships is the same. I mean, of course, "knowing when to talk and what to say." This is the important thing.

Many people can talk and many people can listen, but most people can do only one or the other well. One of my journalism instructors has that rare ability of being able to talk and to make others talk. His is the true mark of a genius. He becomes both a social and an intellectual friend, for conversation is the only immediate art, and by far the most practical. As with all the arts, there is naturally good and bad conversation. With so many practicing it, it is bound to be abused. Good conversation requires a vigorous, interested and interesting mind; look for it in the eyes.

Another of my friends does this same thing socially,

not with words but with a smile like a California sunset. She, also, possesses the secret.

There are yet other ways of "possessing the secret" — too many even to get started on. There are also other kinds of friends. There are, for instance, the friends we create. I don't even like to talk about them; they are unreal and unsatisfying.

A woman told me last week that she didn't know what she would do if anything happened to her Pekingese dog. I told her my father had plenty of cats she could have. Yes, she said, but this dog was like a friend to her — "really more than a friend," she said. I was curious. I asked her why. She said she didn't want real friendships any more, only acquaintances. "I can't stand the strain of death breaking up friendships," she said. She was refusing to play the game by the rules, and so naturally she was not being asked to play.

No dog or cat or any other animal for that matter ever alienated my affection for people. Some people find animals more interesting, but I don't. Animals are too unpretentious. It's a person's pretensions that make him interesting.

Well, so much for created friends.

"Never Met" Friends

Then there are the friends we've never met. These are, I suppose, to be found almost for the looking — but you must look. They turn up in books that you read or in letters that you receive, but they do not turn up in every book or in every letter.

During the past summer I wrote to the chamber of commerce in a middle-sized Georgia town I intended to visit. The letter I received from the executive secretary was one of the sheer pleasures of my summer of mail-reading. Not only had the man sent me lots of information about his town, but he had written a letter revealing such a genuine interest in me and my trip that I wrote back trying to express my thanks as sincerely. We continued to correspond throughout the summer, and though I didn't get to make the trip, my friend-I've-never-met hopes that I may yet, and I hope so too.

Book Friends

Finally, some of my friends I know only from books. But these friends too are real and satisfying. They talk and we listen, and they take us away from where we are. I have sat awestruck at the feet of genius in a crowded atelier on the rue de Fleurus. I have walked hand-in-hand with genius through the cobblestone streets of Lichfield. I have heard the Conversations of genius in a plain New England meeting house. I have worked with genius in the fields of Iowa developing hybrid corn. I have known genius accepted in Australia's bush country and rejected in its cities, though the children walk again in both places. . . .

. . . I have seen a maid go up in flames at Rouen, and have heard her "Voices" in the bells. I have stumped Louisiana to make every man a king. I was in a car that streaked heedlessly across the California landscape, bringing death in the afternoon to an Indiana farm boy. I have been many places, and have known many friends.